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THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

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III. THE INAUGURATION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

This was at Sinai. From a very early period the Old Testament had contrasted the people of God with other peoples. It first appears in Gen. iv. and v. In Gen. x. 8 seq. this contrast heightens into a distinction between God's people and a world-kingdom, which is a distinction that never disappears. The real beginning of the kingly rule was when Yahweh bound the tribes of Israel into a community by the formation of a legal covenant. This covenant was the constitution of the kingdom of God. It had been necessary to make a preparation for this inauguration of the kingdom, even as a preparation was needed for the coming of Christ. The ideas previously mentioned were a part of this preparation. The family of Abraham had been enlarged to a tribe—to a race; the furnace of affliction in Egypt and the wonderful deliverance under the guidance of Yahweh made the race a nation; the preparation was completed; the kingdom was inaugurated, for a fullness of time was reached. The records respecting the inauguration of this kingdom are in Exod. xix. 3-19; xx. 18-21; xxiv. 3-8. The covenant proposed by God was verbally accepted by the people at once, and later it was formally ratified.

In Exod. xix. 3-6 we find that God's assumption of the kingship is based upon his deliverance of Israel from Egypt. Even as to-day we assure the saint and sinner alike that they belong to God by virtue of a redemption wrought out in Christ, so Moses and the prophets always based God's peculiar claims to Israel upon the deliverance from Egypt. There is, however, a yet broader presupposition, i. e., that Yahweh owns all the earth. As all other nations have forsaken God and know him not, God left them and chose Israel as his peculiar people, and this for some reason of his own. In this choice there was also an element of separation or exclusiveness. This exclusiveness was temporarily external. Although there was to be forever an inner separation, the outer separation was not an essential or permanent characteristic of the religion. The real meaning of the exclusiveness concerned a holy character, and that has not abated even at this day.

The purpose of this choice was to bring Israel into intimate relations with God. They were to be priests, i. e., servants to God; holy, i. e., dedicated to him. The exclusiveness was not explained save that it was based upon their relations with God and that it was for the purpose of maintaining these relations.

IV. THE KINGDOM OF GOD AS A THEOCRACY.

In the historical development of this kingdom it has been called a theocracy. All political powers were united in God, and he ruled through such agents as he chose. The character of the agent was no essential element in the theocracy, provided he was sent from God. Neither was a constant miraculous element necessary more than it has been in the Christian church. The great fact was that Israel was in covenant with God, so that they were his peculiar people and he

their chosen king. The agent in this theocracy might be prophet, as Samuel, priest, as Phinehas, or king, as David, or a special servant, as Joshua or Gideon. Still the theocracy was established through the mediation of a prophet, and a prophet was regarded as occupying a chief rank among the agents in the theocracy.

The privileges in this kingdom were the nearness of God (Deut. iv. 7, 8) and a righteous law (Deut. xxxiii. 3, 4; iv. 6). This relation had been entered as a matter of choice, hence it was a moral relation; it recognized duties and obligations, hence it required discipline. Such was the ideal of the kingdom at the time of its inauguration.

The ideal has been given in outline; preparatory thoughts have been noticed: e. g., the contrast between God's people and those who were not God's people; the family covenant with Abraham now ratified as a national covenant; the idea of kingship and of divine headship outside of recorded revelation; also the idea of the kinship between human and divine persons—all these had brought to pass the fullness of time—a fullness as necessary as that when Christ should come—when the kingdom of God should be inaugurated. It is, however, to be remarked that at the very outset the people accepted the relation, entered into covenant, but were incapable of entering into the full privileges of the covenant. Instead of entering into a direct personal relation with God at once, they (Exod. xx. 19) asked for a mediating agent from God. This proved one thing at least, that they had not appropriated that degree of revelation which had at that time been given them. Thus it came to pass that from the outset the settled usage of the kingdom was that the subjects should approach their ruler only through a king, who in turn delivered the king's message to them.

The history of the kingdom of God in Israel shows that the government of the kingdom was carried on through mediating agents wholly. At no period did more than a few choice spirits seem even to desire to enter into that familiar relationship with Yahweh which was the ideal of the Sinaitic covenant. Yet this ideal of universal privilege ever remained that to which the chosen agents of the king always strove to lead the people.

V. TRANSITION UNDER SAMUEL.

There was no substantial difference in the attitude of the people until the time of Samuel. The people apparently felt the ideal of the kingdom to be too high for them ever to attain unto. They renounced the possibility of becoming a kingdom of priests, having Yahweh alone as king, and of being each directly governed by him. They accepted their spiritual incapacity as a settled state of things and demanded a human king. As has already been indicated, the theocracy does not necessarily exclude a king, the very conception of civil society implies or requires organization and headship. The conception of direct relationship with God does not necessitate the exclusion also of mediate relationship. On the other hand, the request for a permanent order of kings, who should constantly mediate between God and his subjects in all the functions of kingship, this request was not a declension, but an acquiescence in a state out of which they had never risen.

This appointment of the king did not make Israel any less a kingdom of God than before; it rather sent the people to the king as God's representative, and did not invite them as a whole directly to God. This was a part of the honor due to the king in his representative capacity. In fact, that which was due to the king in this capacity was carefully defined (1 Sam. x. 25). In a less conspicuous

manner there was set up beside the royal office another permanent power as a balance—and a corrective of possible abuse. This was the prophetic order. Previously there had been no prophetic order, although there had been prophets. The great aim of this order was to lead Israel to render actual the ideal of the kingdom, in other words, to observe the covenant made at Sinai. They saw no way to the establishment of the kingdom save through the observance of the Mosaic law as based upon this covenant. During successive generations they penetrated more and more deeply into the meaning of the covenant, and accordingly they were not satisfied with the former standards of obedience. As one contest with disobedience followed another, sin was found to be more profound in its nature, and righteousness broader in its scope, and to require deeper foundations than outward obedience.

VI. DEVELOPMENT UNDER THE KINGS.

While the history of the prophetic order followed the course just indicated, the history of the kingly order took a direction of its own. The occasion which called this order into being was the wars waged between Israel and its neighbors. The struggle for existence was finally brought to a triumphant issue by David. These wars and conquests nurtured the national consciousness and made it perhaps as perfect as it ever was before the captivity. With this development of the national consciousness came a development of the kingdom of God. David as the theocratic king recognized as never before the nature of the kingdom and of the proper human kingship (2 Sam. xxiii. 3). It was seen that righteousness was the fundamental law of this kingdom, whoever might administer it. This idea of an earthly sovereign ruling in direct responsibility to a righteous God and for the purpose of maintaining righteous principles gave a perfected standard for judging human kingdoms, a standard which later prophets used. It was seen, however, that this ideal was realized in Israel only as the king was a devout worshiper of Yahweh.

The history of the next two hundred years after the death of David was the history of an attempt to realize as fully as possible the ideal of the kingdom proclaimed at Sinai. By the necessity of the case this ideal was more fully unfolded. Two centuries of king and prophet showed it impossible to bridge the gap between the actual kingdom and the ideal. In this period there was not merely the failure to rise, but there was a practical renunciation of the covenant. This had its beginning in the reign of David, who most perfectly realized the standard of the theocratic king. The beginning was slight. It was the marriage with a foreign princess. The immediate result of this and of the numerous marriages of a similar character on the part of Solomon was to form political and commercial relations with neighboring nations. The exclusiveness which was essential to the kingdom of God was lost. The influx of foreign ideas and customs was partially checked from time to time by some king who labored in harmony with the prophetic order. The kings often opposed the prophets and gave their influence to the promotion of foreign customs and heathen worship. These seemed to have attained their height at the time of Athaliah. The worship of Yahweh had come to be as the flippant Charles II. said of Presbytery, "no religion for a gentleman." The reaction against this downright paganism was successful; but it was followed by a formalism which was deadening to the spiritual life. The remainder of the independent history of the nation was an alternation of paganism and the formal worship of Yahweh as the religion of the controlling classes of the nation.

VII. EARLY PSALMS CONCERNING THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

The idea of the kingdom of God as seen in song is extremely interesting. The true kingly character as recognized by David has been mentioned (2 Sam. XXIII. 1-7; cf. Ps. LXXII. and CI.). The prevalent idea of the earlier psalms which mention the kingdom of God is that of the splendor of the king, the greatness of his power, the universality or permanency of his reign (Ps. XLV., LXXII., CX., CXXXII.). Some psalms represent Yahweh as judging his people, or all the earth, or as ruling or possessing the same (Ps. IX., XXIV., L., LXVIII.). Also the earthly king is set up by Yahweh. Here the future joins right on to the present and was but a glorified development out of it.

VIII. THE KINGDOM OF GOD DEFERRED TO THE FUTURE.

Each century after David saw the actual kingdom receding more and more from the ideal even of its songs. The heightening ideal of the prophets did not raise the people. At last a change in the situation was accepted by the prophetic order, the past was flung away, the present development was accepted as transitory, and the establishment of the kingdom of God came to be regarded as possible only by a complete renovation of society then existing. As has been seen in Samuel's time, the people failed to rise to the privileges of the Sinaitic covenant. Before Isaiah's time (about 750 B. C.) the people had declined so far as practically to reject this covenant. This rejection had never been formal, but it was real. It had come to pass that when unrighteous kings adopted a foreign worship the people as a body followed them. Righteous kings never succeeded in undoing this work. Foreign influence became more and more operative in the life of Israel; this change had been largely enhanced by the division into two kingdoms.

The activity of the prophetic order took on a new form. At the outset they had sought to secure righteous government by the kings. Later they came more fully into relation with the entire life of the nation. The arts of the orator came into prominence. From about the beginning of the eighth century B. C. their labors included the formation of a literature. Such prophets as Elijah (called prophets of action) had tried to secure some form of obedience to Yahweh—to secure recognition of Yahweh as the God whom the entire nation ought to worship. They were able to secure a nominal worship of Yahweh. The labors of such prophets as Hosea and Isaiah (called literary prophets) were to secure real worship of Yahweh. These efforts were based upon the Sinaitic covenant. When the people had practically disowned the covenant while professing service to Yahweh the prophetic activity must necessarily undergo some modification.

IX. THE CHARACTER OF THE WORK OF THE PROPHETS.

The general nature of this activity was twofold. It was ethical and gracious. They were teachers of righteousness and messengers of grace. As teachers of righteousness they were expounders of the Sinaitic covenant. Although it was really disowned by the people, the prophets had no authority to abrogate it. The earlier and non-literary prophets were almost wholly ethical. There were occasional exceptions, e. g., 2 Sam. VII. 12 seq. All prophets were ethical prophets. They asserted the reign of a moral law over all men and the government of a God who executed this law. They announced retribution for sin, destruction upon unrepentant sinners, but deliverance and reward for righteousness. In this function their predictions were, in part at least, conditional. The character of the conditions can be seen in 1 Sam. II. 30; Isa. I. 27; XLVIII. 18, 22. They pre-announced

the destinies of nations outside of Israel. They taught the nature of God and the universality of his power. The prophets did not create these ideas. God gave to Israel their lofty ideas of himself—not by abstract statements, but by deeds—the call of Abraham, the exodus, the settlement in Canaan and the subsequent guidance.

So far as God was conceived or taught as a God of grace there was room for development outside of the Sinaitic covenant. As an ethical teacher, the prophet could teach the grace of God as a motive to righteousness. As merely an ethical teacher, he could not pledge that grace in the future. The basis of the work of the prophet as a minister of grace is earlier than the Sinaitic covenant. It may be believed that the paradisaic promise of deliverance, Gen. III. 15, was one element of the basis. The most important element was the promise to Abraham, Gen. XII. 2, 3. With these should be joined 2 Sam. VII. 16; Deut. XXXII. More and more the prophets came to be preachers of sovereign grace. Israel was to be blessed, and through Israel all nations. They freely pledge divine forgiveness to the future times. These promises were unconditional, i. e., irrespective of present human conduct. A new covenant pledged, Jer. XXXI. 31 seq., is the classic passage. The hope of Jeremiah was not that Israel would do better, but that God would do more. No covenant of works would suffice—one of grace was necessary. The constitution of the kingdom of God as proclaimed at Sinai revealed the defects in human nature, and these defects were to be provided for. The present constitution of things was accepted as totally inadequate, and the kingdom of God was regarded as belonging to the future rather than the present. The prophets sketched the ideal of that kingdom of God.

X. MESSIANIC PROPHECY.

The prophetic utterances sketching the transformed ideals of the kingdom of God constitute Messianic prophecy. Earlier Messianic prophecy is expressed in the lower hopes of the Davidic psalms, but the acme of prophecy is found when the hope and ideal is transformed. Even when changed, there were great underlying features of identity. The divine kingship, a covenant, also the exclusive possession by God of his subjects, were in the new ideals. There is to be a righteous representative of God ruling righteous subjects. These were not hinged on the present good behavior of Israel, but God is the prime mover. The service is to consist in spiritual worship, not to be taught through a priest, hence not ritual. And there is to be abundant provision for forgiveness. These ideals receive such treatment that Messianic prophecy develops into a system. The Davidic prophecies concerned the future of the kingdom of God. No failure on the part of the people had as yet appeared to show the impracticable nature of the form of things then existing. Those prophecies had been scattered and unsystematic. But as the literary prophets take up the theme of the future renovation and reorganization of the kingdom of God, they bind all prophecy of it into a compact system.

The ideal may be briefly sketched as follows :

1. *External relations.* An underlying thought of Old Testament prophecy is the antagonism between the society of men by whom the true God is served and worshiped, and the societies of men which constitute world-kingdoms. Egypt and Assyria are the kingdoms distinctly represented as symbolizing the world-powers. These kingdoms, especially Assyria, were punishers of Israel, used by Yahweh to discipline his rebellious people; yet they were liable to be defeated

when victory seemed most certain, whereby the power and glory of Yahweh were revealed upon them. Pre-eminently the Assyrian kingdom exhibits that kind of a kingdom which at all times is antagonistic to the kingdom of God. On the other hand, the endurance of the society of God in the face of all opposition, winning success in spite of the world powers, is a frequent theme of Messianic prophecy. God is righteous; his will moves steadily and irresistibly toward its end. It is not a blind necessity; hence those who work for God's will must work righteously. Herein lay the reason that the world-powers were at any moment liable to be checked or cast aside.

2. *The day of Yahweh.* This was the crisis which should usher in the new era of the kingdom of God. The opposition of world-kingsdoms and the wickedness of men are to become more open and stronger in defiance of God's will. The righteous will of God will reveal itself more fully until at last, in full consummation, it shall destroy every vestige of opposition in some climax of judgment. Two lines of prophecy point to this day so far as Israel is concerned. Israel is to be sifted, sinners are to be destroyed, a righteous remnant is to be saved. Again, Israel is to be converted, humbled, brought to repentance by God's chastisements, and renewed by his Spirit. When this aim has been accomplished the wicked, who have been God's unconscious and self-seeking instruments, will be cast aside and destroyed.

3. *Character.* The subjects of the kingdom shall be fit company for God, and a more intimate relation than ever shall be established on the basis of a better covenant. The preaching of grace was not without ethical character. God's blessing would surely come, but a part of the blessing was in securing righteous character.

4. *Extent.* This future kingdom was to be universal. It was to be a world-wide commonwealth, with its center at Zion. A universal brotherhood was to worship God, who was to be made known by the missionary activity of Israel. In its accomplishment this idea has been at once a stumbling-block and a mighty proof of Christianity.

5. *Ruler.* Thus far the Messianic prophecies in the broad sense. From one point of view, Messianic prophecy was a development. The general promise of blessing to Israel and then through Israel was first conceived as having reference to temporal prosperity; was later regarded as requiring a ruler who should represent Yahweh and defend Israel from enemies; later he was expected to secure righteous conduct and true worship; still later appears the idea that he should secure their safety by his own peril and suffering, and finally should mediate in worship between them and God. The ruler is represented as a king of an earthly royal line, that of David. Yet at the same time the king is often Yahweh himself.

With such ideals of the kingdom of God, wrought out on the basis of divine grace and promise, and on the ruins of human failure, the Old Testaments finished their work. For Israel at the close of Old Testament history the kingdom of God had a past and a future, but no present.